

Daily Southtown, March 25, 2007

One of my favorite nonprofit organizations recently released its list of federal pork-barrel projects, although a trio of Republican congressmen dampened the fun last year by successfully passing a pork moratorium for certain bills.

Still, tucked into the Defense and Homeland Security Appropriation Acts -- one of the bills susceptible to bacon drippings -- Citizens Against Government Waste identified 2,658 projects at a cost of \$13.2 billion.

In reviewing the wise choices of our fine public servants and how they intend to spend our tax money, I realized I could meet the same goals at a much lower cost.

For example, Congress awarded a \$5.5 million grant to the Gallo Center to study the effects of alcohol and drug abuse on the brain. With a camcorder and a bottle of sauvignon blanc, I could provide the Gallo Center with some compelling data. My price? Just \$25,000.

We taxpayers also will fund a \$1.65 million study to improve the shelf life of vegetables. Thankfully, I've already resolved this urgent problem. It's called refrigeration.

Congress also seems to be confused about why people get fat, particularly in the military. We will spend \$1.3 million to research and reduce the numbers of chubby soldiers. Here's an idea: more exercise, less beer, fewer cigarettes and sugar-free cookies.

And while I love a good science-fiction novel, should we really spend \$1 million on a telescope to search for extra-terrestrial intelligence? Have we learned nothing from the movie "E.T.?" Forget telescopes, people. Just sprinkle some Reeses Pieces on the patio and grab a camera.

Citizens Against Government Waste crowned U.S. Rep. Sam Farr (D-California) Porker of the Month for sponsoring a \$25 million bailout for spinach growers. Our very own U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, of the North Shore-based 10th Congressional District, tried to strike the spinach spoil from

the bill but couldn't get it ironed out. (Get it? Spinach? Iron?)

And, of course, there's the whopping \$1.19 billion to be spent on 20 F-22A fighter jets, which Congress' own auditing arm -- the Government Accountability Office -- criticized as unnecessary and out of date.

Even these piggy projects wilt compared to an all-time favorite porky pick: a \$50,000 grant sponsored by a California Democrat several years ago for a tattoo removal program. Priorities, priorities.